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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [SNAR](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [MARR](#) [PM](#) [POL](#) [CHIEF](#)

SUBJECT: INTERAGENCY TEAM DISCUSSES SECURITY COOPERATION
WITH PANAMA

REF: STATE 160907 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador William A. Eaton. Reasons 1.4 (B/D)

11. (C) Summary: Panamanian President Torrijos and his principal national security advisors met with a visiting USG interagency delegation September 29 and agreed to pursue enhanced information sharing, improve border security cooperation, and develop a mechanism for closer bilateral security coordination. Torrijos and his team are prepared for further discussions on these issues in the weeks leading up to, and during, President Bush's visit to Panama in November. This initiative provides the USG with a unique opportunity to enhance our homeland security and strengthen Panama's ability to fight terrorism and narcotics trafficking as it anchors an evolving North American security community. End Summary

U.S. and Panama Discuss Security Cooperation

12. (C) WHA DAS Dan Fisk led an interagency delegation to Panama City September 28) 30 for consultations with the GOP regarding the Panama Secure Trade & Transportation Initiative (PST&TI). PST&TI represents the Torrijos Administration's framework for national security planning and international cooperation and seeks to take advantage of Panama's geographic location and growing importance in global maritime trade. DASD Roger Pardo-Maurer and DHS Director for Latin America Suzanne Petrie also participated in the USG delegation, along with colleagues from the Departments of State, Justice, Defense, Homeland Security, and the CIA. Discussions focused on opportunities for enhanced information sharing, cooperation to enhance border security, and mechanisms for formalizing ongoing bilateral security consultations. As DAS Fisk noted in his concluding remarks to U.S. and Panamanian officials, this trip provided USG participants with a unique opportunity to interact with the intellectual authors of the Panamanian proposal and to learn more about its contours. The Panamanians were clearly impressed with the breadth and depth of U.S. representation, and welcomed the opportunity to interact with USG counterparts.

Torrijos Stresses Regional Context

13. (C) At a September 29 breakfast he hosted, President Torrijos, joined by Foreign Minister Lewis, Minister of Government and Justice Aleman, and Intelligence Chief Leonel Solis, stressed Panama's desire to strengthen security cooperation with the U.S. During the discussion, Torrijos emphasized the linkage between security and prosperity, noting the importance of promoting human development throughout the region. The group discussed the regional dimensions of Panama's security proposal, with DASD Pardo-Maurer expressing hope that Panama could help anchor a regional security strategy for Central America. With this in mind, Torrijos noted that Panama would be assuming the Presidency of SICA (the Central American System for Regional Integration) at the end of the year and would seek to focus that organization on concrete objectives.

GOP Updates on Security Strategy

14. (C) Leading off the formal discussions later in the day, Minister of Government and Justice Aleman and his colleagues provided the U.S. delegation with an update to the PST&TI proposal, which had first been presented in early April, 2005. The PST&TI proposal has been developed by a GOP inter-agency team and continues to bear President Torrijos personal imprint. Aleman focused his presentation on the ongoing restructuring of Panama's security forces, including changes in Customs, the Police, and the Air and Maritime Services. (Note: While Aleman unveiled the GOP's plan to merge the Air and Maritime Services into a new &Coast Guard, it has since become clear that this initiative has not been fully developed.) USG participants were also provided additional details regarding Panama's proposed information analysis system and its interest in biomedical research and development. Detailed background information has been shared with USG participants in the meeting.

15. (C) As in previous discussions, participants focused on the importance of the Panama Canal to global maritime trade and its potential vulnerability to terrorist attack. At the Embassy,s request, a senior representative from the Panama Canal Authority (ACP) was included in this meeting. His participation allowed us to bring earlier discussions with the ACP regarding information sharing into the broader context of the bilateral initiatives being planned. In conversations after our meeting, all participants agreed that it was useful to have the Canal included in the discussions.

Defining areas for Cooperation

16. (C) USG representatives stressed our desire to strengthen bilateral security cooperation and to develop concrete deliverables in advance of the President,s November visit to Panama. In subsequent working group sessions devoted to information sharing, security force restructuring, and trade/transportation security, representatives agreed that there were several areas that were particularly promising. These include:

- Development of information sharing systems;
- Potential progress on the Container Security Initiative (CSI);
- Enhanced Border Security Assistance;
- Development of a bilateral ad hoc mechanism for security-related consultations

17. (C) Foreign Minister Lewis expressed support for the ad hoc bilateral security consultative mechanism. This would seek to formalize what we are doing with Panama as part of this initiative. Embassy believes that such a mechanism would not only help us keep PST&TI on track, but could also serve as a forum for reviewing the progress of ongoing initiatives.

Next Steps

18. (C) Participants at the September 29 consultations agreed that there would be an opportunity to follow up on elements of the discussions during the SecDef,s Central American Defense Ministerial scheduled for October 12) 14 in Miami, although they acknowledged that these meetings would not be devoted solely to PST&TI. The President,s visit to the Canal also offers an opportunity for the two leaders to publicly affirm their commitment to secure trade and transportation infrastructure, perhaps in the form of a joint declaration that could be issued during the visit.

19. (C) In order to maintain the momentum from these discussions, Embassy believes that the following high priority activities should be scheduled before the end of CY-2005:

A visit by a CBP team to discuss CSI with Panama,s new Customs Director and staff;

A visit by an inter-agency team of technical experts to develop a test of the proposed information sharing system;

Presentation of a proposal for the ad hoc bilateral security consultation mechanism, that could possibly be announced during the POTUS visit;

Comment

10. (C) As they did in April, Panama,s national security team impressed USG counterparts with the amount of effort that has gone into their proposal for enhanced security cooperation. We have shown the GOP that we are serious in looking for ways to respond positively to their proposal within resource constraints. The November visit provides both governments with a unique opportunity to accelerate the development and implementation of new initiatives.

EATON